

ON THE
DUTIES OF THE YOUNG.

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BY DR. BLAIR.
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ON THE DUTIES OF THE YOUNG.



The uncertainty of the enjoyments of human life checks presumption; the multiplicity of its dangers demands perpetual caution. Moderation, vigilance, and self-government, are duties incumbent on all; but especially on such as are beginning the journey of life. The scenes which present themselves, at our entering upon the world, are commonly flattering. Whatever they be in themselves, the lively spirits of the young gild every opening prospect. The field of hope appears to stretch wide before them. Pleasure seems to put forth its blossoms on every side. Impelled by desire, forward they rush with inconsiderate ardour: Prompt to decide, and to chuse; averse to hesitate, or to inquire; credulous, because untaught by experience; rash, because unacquainted with danger; headstrong, because unsubdued by disappointment.

As soon as you are capable of reflection, you must perceive that there is a right and a wrong in human actions. You see, that those who are born with the same advantages of fortune, are not all equally prosperous in the course of life. While some of them, by wise and steady conduct, attain distinction in the world, and pass their days with comfort and honour; others of the same rank, by mean and vicious behaviour, forfeit the advantages of their birth, involve themselves in much misery, and end in being a dis-

grace to their friends, and a burden on society. Early then, you may learn, that it is not on the external condition in which you find yourselves placed, but on the part which you are to act, that your welfare or unhappiness, your honour or infamy, depend. Now when beginning to act that part, what can be of greater moment, than to regulate your plan of conduct with the most serious attention, before you have yet committed any fatal or irretrievable errors? If, instead of exerting reflection for this valuable purpose, you deliver yourselves up at so critical a time, to sloth and pleasure; if you refuse to listen to any counsellor but humour, or to attend to any pursuit except that of amusement; if you allow yourselves to float loose and careless on the tide of life, ready to receive any direction which the current of fashion may chance to give you, what can you expect to follow from such beginnings? While so many around you are undergoing the sad consequences of a like indiscretion, for what reason shall not those consequences extend to you? Shall you attain success without that preparation, and escape dangers without that precaution, which is required of others? Shall happiness grow up to you of its own accord, and solicit your acceptance, when to the rest of mankind, it is the fruit of long cultivation, and the acquisition of labour and care?—Deceive not yourselves with such arrogant hopes. Whatever be your rank. Providence will not, for your sake, reverse its established order. The Author of your being hath enjoined you to *take heed to your ways; to ponder the paths of your feet; to remember your Creator in the days of your youth.* He hath decreed, that *they only who seek after wisdom shall find it; that fools shall be afflicted because of their transgressions; and that who so refuseth instruction shall destroy his own soul.* By listening to these admonitions, and tempering the vivacity of youth with a proper mixture of serious thought, you may ensure cheerfulness for the rest of life; but by de

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vering yourselves up at present to giddiness and levity, you lay the foundation of lasting heaviness of heart.

When you look forward to those plans of life, which either your circumstances have suggested, or your friends have proposed, you will not hesitate to acknowledge that, in order to pursue them with advantage, some previous discipline is requisite. Be assured, that whatever is to be your profession, no education is more necessary to your success, than the requirement of virtuous dispositions and habits. This is the universal preparation for every character, and every station in life. Bad as the world is, respect is always paid to virtue. In the usual course of human affairs, it will be found, that a plain understanding joined with acknowledged worth, contributes more to prosperity, than the brightest parts without probity or honour. Whether science, or business, or public life be your aim, virtue still enters, for a principal share, into all those great departments of society. It is connected with eminence in every liberal art; with reputation, in every branch of fair and useful business; with distinction, in every public station. The vigour which it gives the mind, and the weight which it adds to character; the generous sentiments which it breathes, the undaunted spirit which it inspires, the ardour of diligence which it quickens, the freedom which it procures from pernicious and dishonourable avocations, are the foundations of all that is high in fame, or great in success among men.

Whatever ornamental or engaging endowments you now possess, virtue is a necessary requisite, in order to their shining with proper lustre. Feeble are the attractions of the fairest form, if it be suspected that nothing within corresponds to the pleasing appearance without. Short are the triumphs of wit, when it is supposed to be the vehicle of malice. By whatever arts you may at first attract the attention, you can hold the esteem, and secure the hearts of others, only by amiable dispositions, and the accomplishments

of the mind. These are the qualities whose influence will last, when the lustre of all that once sparkled and dazzled has passed away. Let not then the season of youth be barren of improvements so essential to your future felicity and honour. Now is the seed-time of life; and according to *what you sow, you shall reap*. Your character is now, under Divine assistance, of your own forming; your fate is, in some measure, put into your own hands. Your nature is as yet pliant and soft. Habits have not established their dominion. Prejudices have not pre-occupied your understanding. The world has not had time to contract and debase your affections. All your powers are more vigorous, dis-embarrassed, and free, than they will be at any future period. Whatever impulse you now give to your desires and passions, the direction is likely to continue. It will form the channel in which your life is to run; nay, it may determine its everlasting issue. Consider then the employment of this important period, as the highest trust which shall ever be committed to you; as, in a great measure, decisive of your happiness, in time, and in eternity. As in the succession of the seasons, each, by the invariable laws of Nature, affects the productions of what is next in course; so, in human life, every period of our age, according as it is well or ill spent, influences the happiness of that which is to follow. Virtuous youth gradually brings forward accomplished and flourishing manhood; and such manhood passes of itself, without uneasiness, into respectable and tranquil old age. But when Nature is turned out of its regular course, disorder takes place in the moral, just as in the vegetable world. If the Spring put forth no blossoms, in Summer there will be no beauty, and in Autumn no fruit. So, if youth be trifled away without improvement, manhood will be contemptible, and old age miserable. If the beginnings of life have been *vanity*, its later end can be no other than *vexation of spirit*.

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Piety to God is the foundation of good morals, and a disposition particularly graceful and becoming in youth. To be void of it, argues a cold heart, destitute of some of the best affections which belong to that age. Youth is the season of warm and generous emotions. The heart should then, spontaneously, rise into the admiration of what is great, glow with the love of what is fair and excellent, and melt at the discovery of tenderness and goodness. Where can any object be found, so proper to kindle those affections, as the Father of the universe, and the Author of all felicity? Unmoved by veneration, can you contemplate that grandeur and majesty, which his works every where display? Untouched by gratitude, can you view that profusion of good, which, in this pleasing season of life, his beneficent hand pours around you? Happy in the love and affection of those with whom you are connected, look up to the Supreme Being, as the inspirer of all the friendship which has ever been shewn you by others; himself, your best and your first friend; formerly, the supporter of your infancy, and the guide of your childhood; now, the guardian of your youth, and the hope of your coming years. View religious homage, as a natural expression of gratitude to him for all his goodness. Connected with so many tender sensibilities of soul, let religion be with you, not the cold and barren offspring of speculation, but the warm and vigorous dictate of the heart. But though piety chiefly belong to the heart, yet the aid of the understanding is requisite, to give a proper direction to the devout affections. You must endeavour, therefore, to acquire just views, both of the great principles of natural religion, and of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. For this end study the sacred scriptures. Consult the word of God, more than the systems of men, if you would know the truth in its native purity. When, upon rational and sober inquiry,

you have established your principles, suffer them not to be shaken by the scoffs of the licentious, or the cavils of the sceptical. Remember, that in the examination of every great and comprehensive plan, such as that of Christianity, difficulties may be expected to occur; and that reasonable evidence is not to be rejected, because the nature of our present state allows us only to *know in part, and to see through a glass darkly.* Impress your minds with reverence for all that is sacred. Let no wantonness of youthful spirits, no compliance with the intemperate mirth of others, ever betray you into prophane sallies. Besides the guilt which is thereby incurred, nothing gives a more odious appearance of petulance and presumption to youth, than the affectation of treating religion with levity. Instead of being an evidence of superior understanding, it discovers a pert and shallow mind; which, vain of the first smatterings of knowledge, presumes to make light of what the rest of mankind revere. At the same time you are not to imagine, that when exhorted to be religious, you are called upon to become more formal and solemn in your manners than others of the same years, or to erect yourselves into supercilious reprovers of those around you. The spirit of true religion breathes gentleness and affability. It gives a native, unaffected ease to the behaviour. It is social, kind, and cheerful; far removed from that gloomy and illiberal superstition which clouds the brow, sharpens the temper, dejects the spirits, and teaches men to fit themselves for another world, by neglecting the concerns of this. Let your religion, on the contrary, connect preparation for heaven, with an honourable discharge of the duties of active life. Let it be associated in your imagination, with all that is manly and useful; *with whatsoever things are true, are just, are pure, are lovely, are of good report, wherever there is any virtue, and wherever there is any praise.* Of such religion

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discover, on every proper occasion, that you are not
shamed; but avoid making any unnecessary ostenta-
tion of it before the world.

To piety, join modesty and docility, reverence of
your parents, and submission to those who are your
superiors in knowledge, in station, and in years. De-
pendence and obedience belong to youth. Modesty
is one of its chief ornaments; and has ever been es-
teemed a presage of rising merit. When entering on
the career of life, it is your part, not to assume the
reins as yet into your hands; but to commit yourselves
to the guidance of the more experienced, and to be-
come wise by the wisdom of those who have gone be-
fore you.

Of all the follies incident to youth,
there are none which either deform its present appear-
ance, or blast the prospect of its future prosperity, more
than self-conceit, presumption, and obstinacy. By
checking its natural progress in improvement, they fix
it in long immaturity; and frequently produce mis-
chiefs, which can never be repaired. Yet these are vices
too commonly found among the young. Big with en-
terprise, and elated by hope, they resolve to trust for
success to none but themselves. Full of their own abili-
ties, they deride the admonitions which are given
them by their friends, as the timorous suggestions of
age. Too wise to learn, too impatient to deliberate,
too forward to be restrained, they plunge, with preci-
pitant indiscretion, into the midst of all the dangers
with which life abounds. *Seest thou a young man wise in
his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool, than of him.*

—Positive as you now are in your opinions, and con-
fident in your assertions, be assured, that the time ap-
proaches when both men and things will appear to you
in a different light. Many characters which you now
admire, will, by and by, sink in your esteem; and
many opinions, of which you are at present most tena-
cious, will alter as you advance in years. Distrust,
therefore, that glare of youthful presumption, which



dazzles your eyes. Abound not in your own sense. Put not yourselves forward with too much eagerness; nor imagine, that by the impetuosity of juvenile ardour, you can overturn systems which have been long established, and change the face of the world. *Learn not to think more highly of yourselves than you ought, but to think soberly.* By patient and gradual progression in improvement, you may, in due time, command lasting esteem. But by assuming, at present, a tone of superiority, to which you have no title, you will disgust those whose approbation it is most important to gain. Forward vivacity may fit you to be the companions of an idle hour. More solid qualities must recommend you to the wise, and mark you out for importance and consideration in subsequent life.

It is necessary to recommend to you, sincerity and truth. This is the basis of every virtue. That darkness of character, where we can see no heart; those foldings of art, through which no native affection is allowed to penetrate, present an object, unamiable in every season of life, but particularly odious in youth. If, at an age when the heart is warm, when the emotions are strong, and when nature is expected to shew itself free and open, you can already smile and deceive, what are we to look for when you shall be longer hackneyed in the ways of men; when interest shall have completed the obduration of your heart, and experience shall have improved you in all the arts of guile? Dissimulation in youth, is the fore-runner of perfidy in old age. Its first appearance is the fatal omen of growing depravity, and future shame. It degrades parts and learning; obscures the lustre of every accomplishment; and sinks you into contempt with God and man.

As you value, therefore, the approbation of Heaven, or the esteem of the world, cultivate the love of truth. In all your proceedings, be direct and consistent. Ingenuity and candour possess the most powerful charm; they bespeak universal fa-

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our, and carry an apology for almost every failing. *The lip of truth, shall be established for ever; but a lying tongue, is but for a moment.* The path of truth, is a plain and a safe path; that of falsehood, is a perplexing maze. After the first departure from sincerity, it is not in your power to stop. One artifice unavoidably leads on to another; till, as the intricacy of the labyrinth increases, you are left entangled in your own snare. Deceit discovers a little mind, which stops at temporary expedients, without rising to comprehensive views of conduct. It betrays, at the same time, a dastardly spirit. It is the resource of one who wants courage to avow his designs, or to rest upon himself. Whereas, openness of character displays that generous boldness which ought to distinguish youth. To set out in the world with no other principle than a crafty attention to interest, betokens one who is destined for creeping through the inferior walks of life. But to give an early preference to honour above gain, when they stand in competition; to despise every advantage, which cannot be attained without dishonest arts; to brook no meanness, and to stoop to no dissimulation; are the indications of a great mind, the presages of future eminence and distinction in life. At the same time, this virtuous sincerity is perfectly consistent with the most prudent vigilance and caution. It is opposed to cunning, not to true wisdom. It is not the simplicity of a weak and improvident, but the candour of an enlarged and noble mind; of one who scorns deceit, because he accounts it both base and unprofitable; and who seeks no disguise, because he needs none to hide him.

Youth is the proper season of cultivating the benevolent and humane affections. As a great part of our happiness is to depend on the connections which we form with others, it is of high importance that we acquire, betimes, the temper and the manners which will render such connections comfortable. Let



a sense of justice be the foundation of all your social qualities. In your most early intercourse with the world, and even in your youthful amusements, let unfairness be found. Engrave on your mind that sacred rule, of *doing all things to others, according as you wish that they should do unto you*. For this end, improve yourselves with a deep sense of the original and natural equality of men. Whatever advantages of birth or fortune you possess, never display them with arrogant superiority. Leave the subordinations of rank, to regulate the intercourse of more advanced years. At present it becomes you to act among your companions, as man with man. Remember how well known to you are the vicissitudes of the world; and how often they, on whom ignorant and contemptuous young men once looked down with scorn, have risen to be their superiours in future years. Compassion is an emotion of which you ought never to be ashamed. Graceful in youth is the tear of sympathy and the heart that melts at the tale of woe. Let ease and indulgence contract your affections, and wrap you up in selfish enjoyments. But go sometimes to the *house of mourning*, as well as to the *house of feasting*. Accustom yourselves to think of the distresses of human life; of the solitary cottage, the dying parent and the weeping orphan. Never sport with pain and distress, in any of your amusements; nor treat even the meanest insect with wanton cruelty.

Young minds there is commonly a strong propensity to particular intimacies and friendships. Youth, indeed, is the season when friendships are sometimes formed, which not only continue through succeeding life, but which glow to the last, with a tenderness unknown to the connections begun in cooler years. The propensity therefore is not to be discouraged, though at the same time it must be regulated with much circumspection and care. Too many of the pretended friendships of youth, are mere combinations

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 cious likings; suddenly contracted, and as suddenly
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 complaisance and flattery on the one side, and of cred-
 ulous fondness on the other. Beware of such rash and
 dangerous connections, which may afterwards load
 you with dishonour. Remember, that by the charac-
 ter of those whom you choose for your friends, your
 own is likely to be formed, and will certainly be
 judged of by the world. Be slow, therefore, and cau-
 tious in contracting intimacy; but when a virtuous
 friendship is once established, consider it as a sacred
 engagement. Expose not yourselves to the reproach of
 lightness and inconstancy, which always bespeak, either
 trifling, or a base mind. Reveal none of the secrets
 of your friend. Be faithful to his interests. Forsake
 him not in danger. Abhor the thought of acquiring
 any advantage by his prejudice or hurt. In
 order to render yourselves amiable in society, correct
 every appearance of harshness in behaviour. Let
 that courtesy distinguish your demeanour, which
 springs, not so much from studied politeness, as from
 a mild and gentle heart. Follow the customs of the
 world in matters indifferent; but stop when they be-
 come sinful. Let your manners be simple and natural;
 and of course they will be engaging. Affectation is
 certain deformity. By forming themselves on fantastic
 models, and vying with one another in every reigning
 folly, the young begin with being ridiculous, and end
 in being vicious and immoral.

The love of pleasure, natural to man in every period
 of his life, glows at this age with excessive ardour.
 Novelty adds fresh charms, as yet, to every grati-
 fication. The world appears to spread a continual
 feast; and health, vigour, and high spirits, invite
 them to partake of it without restraint. In vain we
 warn them of latent dangers. Religion is accused of
 insufferable severity, in prohibiting enjoyment: and

the old, when they offer their admonitions, are unbraided with having forgot that they once were young. — And yet, my friends, to what do the restraints of religion, and the counsels of age; with respect to pleasure, amount? They may all be comprized in few words, not to hurt yourselves, and not to hurt others by your pursuit of pleasure. Within these bounds pleasure is lawful; beyond them, it becomes criminal because it is ruinous. Are these restraints any other than what a wise man would choose to impose on himself? We call you not to renounce pleasure, but to enjoy it in safety. Instead of abridging it, we exhort you to pursue it on an extensive plan. We propose measures for securing its possession, and for prolonging its duration. Consult your whole nature. Consider yourselves not only as sensitive, but as rational beings; not only as rational, but social; not only as social, but immortal. Whatever violates your nature in any of these respects, cannot afford true pleasure; any more than that which undermines an essential part of the vital system can promote health. For the truth of this conclusion, we appeal, not merely to the authority of religion, nor to the testimony of the aged, but to yourselves and your own experience. We ask, Whether you have not found, that in a course of criminal excess, your pleasure was more than compensated by succeeding pains. Whether, if not from every particular instance, yet from every habit, at least, of unlawful gratification there did not spring some thorn to wound you, that did not arise some consequence to make you repent it in the issue? If you have any consideration, or a firmness left, avoid temptations, for which you have found yourselves unequal, with as much care, as you would shun pestilential infection. Break off all connections with the loose and profligate. *When sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Look not on the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup; for at the la*

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biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Remove thy way from the strange woman, and come not near the door of her house. Let not thine heart decline to her ways; for her house is the way to hell. Thou goest after her as a bird hasteth to the snare; and knoweth not that it is for his life.

By these unhappy excesses of irregular pleasure in youth, how many amiable dispositions are corrupted or destroyed! How many rising capacities and powers are suppressed! How many flattering hopes of parents and friends are totally extinguished! Who but must drop a tear over human nature, when he beholds that morning which arose so bright, overcast with such untimely darkness; that good humour which once captivated all hearts, that vivacity which sparkled in every company, those abilities which were fitted for adorning the highest station, all sacrificed at the shrine of low sensuality; and one who was formed for running the fair career of life in the midst of public esteem, cut off by his vices at the beginning of his course, or sunk, for the whole of it, into insignificancy and contempt!—These, O sinful Pleasure! are thy trophies. It is thus that, cooperating with the foe of God and man, thou debasest human honour, and blastest the opening prospects of human felicity.

Diligence, industry, and proper improvement of time, are material duties of the young. To no purpose are they endowed with the best abilities, if they want activity for exerting them. Unavailing, in this case, will be every direction that can be given them, either for their temporal or spiritual welfare. In youth the habits of industry are most easily acquired. In youth, the incentives to it are strongest, from ambition and from duty, from emulation and hope, from all the prospects which the beginning of life affords. If, dead to these calls, you already languish in slothful inaction, what will be able to quicken the more sluggish current of advancing years?

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is not only the instrument of improvement, but the foundation of pleasure. Nothing is so opposite to the true enjoyment of life, as the relaxed and feeble state of an indolent mind. He who is a stranger to industry, may possess, but he cannot enjoy. For it is labour only which gives the relish to pleasure. It is the appointed vehicle of every good to man. It is the indispensable condition of our possessing a sound mind in a sound body. Sloth is so inconsistent with both, that it is hard to determine whether it be a greater foe to virtue, or to health and happiness. Inactive as it is in itself, its effects are fatally powerful. Though it appear a slowly flowing stream, yet it undermines all that is stable and flourishing. It not only saps the foundation of every virtue, but pours upon you a deluge of crimes and evils. It is like water which first putrifies by stagnation, and then sends up noxious vapours, and fills the atmosphere with death. Fly, therefore, from idleness, as the certain parent both of guilt and of ruin. And under idleness I include, not mere inaction only, but all that circle of trifling occupations, in which too many saunter away their youth; perpetually engaged in frivolous society, or public amusements, in the labours of dress, or the ostentation of their persons.—Is this the foundation which you lay for future usefulness and esteem? By such accomplishments, do you hope to recommend yourselves to the thinking part of the world, and to answer the expectations of your friends and your country?—Amusements, youth requires. It were vain, it were cruel to prohibit them. But though allowable as the relaxation, they are more culpable as the business, of the young. For they they become the gulf of time, and the poison of the mind. They foment bad passions. They weaken the manly powers. They sink the native vigour of youth into contemptible effeminacy. Redeeming your time from such dangerous waste, seek to fill it with

ent, but the employments which you may review with satisfac-
 opposite to tion. The acquisition of knowledge is one of the
 l and feeble most honourable occupations of youth. The desire
 stranger to of it discovers a liberal mind, and is connected with
 joy. For many accomplishments, and many virtues. But though
 pleasure. In your train of life should not lead you to study, the
 man. It is course of education always furnishes proper employ-
 sing a sound ments to a well-disposed mind. Whatever you pursue,
 sistent with be emulous to excel. Generous ambition, and sensibili-
 ther it be ty to praise, are, especially at your age, among the marks
 ppiness. In of virtue. Think not, that any affluence of fortune, or any
 ally power elevation of rank, exempts you from the duties of ap-
 stream, yeti plication and industry. Industry is the law of our be-
 ing. It no ing; it is the demand of Nature, of Reason, and of God.
 e, but pour Remember always, that the years which now pass over
 t is like wa your heads, leave permanent memorials behind them.
 d then send from your thoughtless minds they may escape; but
 sphere with they remain in the remembrance of God. They
 ness, as the form an important part of the register of your life.
 And unde They will hereafter bear testimony, either for or a-
 y, but all tha gainst you, at that day, when, for all your actions, but
 h too many particularly for the employments of youth, you must
 engaged i give an account to God. Thus I have set before
 ts, in the la you some of the chief qualifications which belong
 ir persons. to a virtuous and religious character; piety, modes-
 future useful ty, truth, benevolence, temperance, and industry.
 nents, do yo Whether your future course is destined to be long or
 thinking par short, after this manner it should commence; and, if it
 ations of yo continue to be thus conducted, its conclusion, at what
 nts, youth re time soever it arrives, will not be inglorious or un-
 rohibit themappy.
 they are mo Let your attention be recalled to that dependance
 For they the on the blessing of Heaven, which, amidst all your
 a of the mind endeavours after improvement, you ought continu-
 ken the man ly to preserve. It is too common with the young,
 our of youth when they resolve to tread the path of virtue and
 deeming yo honour, to set out with presumptuous confidence in
 to fill it wi themselves. Trusting to their own abilities for carry-

ing them successfully through life, they are careless of applying to God, or of deriving any assistance from what they are apt to reckon the gloomy discipline of religion. Alas! how little do they know the dangers which await them? Neither human wisdom, nor human virtue, unsupported by religion, are equal to the trying situations which often occur in life. By the shock of temptation, how frequently have the most virtuous intentions been overthrown? Under the pressure of disaster, how often has the greatest constancy sunk? *Every good and every perfect gift, is from above.* Wisdom and virtue, as well as riches and honour, come from God. Destitute of his favour, you are in no better situation, with all your boasted abilities, than orphans left to wander in a trackless desert, without any guide to conduct them, or any shelter to cover them from the gathering storm. Correct, then, this ill-founded arrogance. Expect not, that your happiness can be independent of him who made you. By faith and repentance, apply to the Redeemer of the world. By piety and prayer, seek the protection of the God of heaven. In fine, remember the solemn words, in which a great Prince delivered his dying charge to his son; words which every young person ought to consider as addressed to himself, and to engrave deeply on his heart: *Thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy fathers, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind. For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.*

END OF
BLAIR ON THE DUTIES OF THE YOUNG.

